



# *The Insider*

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## **Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10**

**December 10, 2004**

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and for giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at [senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov) or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

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### **A Tribute to Corporal Gentian Marku**

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Regardless of your personal feelings on the decision to go to war in Iraq, it is important to remember that there are many young men and women in harm's way. These enlisted men and women volunteered to serve in our military so that they can be the guardians of our democracy and the freedoms that are bestowed upon us. These men and women are heroes and serve with dedication and honor.

The war in Iraq hit close to home for one local family during the Thanksgiving holiday. The story of Corporal Gentian Marku embodies what America is about: a land of freedom and opportunity.

I had an opportunity to make a statement on the Senate floor on December 2, 2004 and I would like to share it with you. I think it brings a new perspective on what it means to be an American:

"As you know, our colleague Senator Dennis Olshove (D-Warren) is home recuperating from illness. Therefore, I rise in his place to pay special tribute to U.S. Marine Corporal Gentian Marku, age 22, of Warren, Michigan, who was killed in action in Falluja, Iraq, on Thanksgiving Day.

Gentian was a recent immigrant to this country from his native Albania. When Gentian was 14, his future looked grim. Albania was in turmoil. The government collapsed amid scandals and bankruptcy. During the civil strife, military arsenals were looted by mobs. During the chaos, Gentian himself was skipping school often. When he did go, he got suspended for throwing an eraser at his teacher. Then his father won the U.S. State Department's Diversity Visa Lottery, a program that randomly selects foreign applicants for visas. The Marku family got the chance to immigrate to Warren, Michigan.

The move changed Gentian's life. "Everything changed when I got to the United States," he recalled. "I started studying. I got my first job ever as a busboy at Big Boy's. I stayed out of trouble." The story of the Marku family is a story that has been written millions of times in America. It is a story of

immigrants coming to this country and working hard to build a new life. Gentian Marku's parents spoke little English and worked two and three jobs to give him and his young sister a chance for a good life.

Instead of pelting his teachers with erasers, Gentian spent extra hours with them in the Warren Woods/Tower ESL, that's the English as a Second Language program, learning to speak English. Luckily that was before many such programs were cut as a result of tight budgets. He handled the family bills and took care of things around the house, becoming a responsible adult while still a teenager.

I saw former Senator Art Miller (D-Warren) this morning who knew Gentian and had seen him working as a busboy. He said to the owner of the restaurant, "Where did you get this kid? He does the work of three people. He is tremendous." Well, that is what Gentian was; he was a hard-working person.

He transformed himself into a high achieving, popular young man. He dreamed of being a Warren cop someday, so he joined the Explorers, a program for youngsters interested in careers as policemen. After graduation, he enlisted in the Marines, rising to the level of corporal. With his hard-won English skills, he served as the translator for the commander of the 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit during an official visit with Albanian civilian and military leaders.

He returned to his village. All of his relatives came to see him at his grandfather's house. They were impressed by the boy who had left his village six years earlier and had returned a man. "Six years ago," his Uncle Ndue announced, "a kid left Albania, and today a man stands before me who is part of the greatest military force in the world. I am happy he decided to join the Marines. It shows me he is very proud of the country where he now lives."

Gentian was killed on Thanksgiving Day in Falluja. Friends called it ironic because he was always thankful for the opportunities life offered when he came to America. Those opportunities come at a price. For us all to be free, a few pay a heavy price. Gentian's death was the price he paid so we all can enjoy a life of freedom and opportunity. As we work today to create a society that is better, fairer, and more just, I pray that we do it with a tenth of the bravery, commitment, and dedication to duty that characterized the life of Gentian Marku.

His family will return his body to the old country for burial with his ancestors. He will return there a U.S. citizen and a hero. America only had Gentian Marku for eight years. He enjoyed many opportunities from this country. America got much more in return from him. We, therefore, offer this tribute to the life of Gentian Marku and offer our heartfelt condolences to his family in this difficult time." (as quoted in the Journal of the Senate, December 2, 2004)

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## **Lame Duck Wrap Up**

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The final days of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Legislature were frantic with activity as legislators scrambled to place the finishing touches on several bills. Numerous bills passed both legislative chambers and are now sent to the governor for her approval. Other bills met a different fate, breathing their final breath of life for this term. Bills that are not signed into law by the end of year automatically expire and will have to be introduced again when the 93<sup>rd</sup> Legislature convenes in January.

Among the major items that were tackled by the Legislature in the final days of Lame Duck includes:

**\*A switch from the High School MEAP:** The Michigan legislature moved a package of bills that would dump the High School Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test in favor of the Michigan Merit Exam and is now awaiting the Governor's approval.

The bipartisan package of bills (Senate Bills 1153-1157), of which I helped sponsor, would provide school administrative savings by requiring less time to administer the test. It would also save parents money by not having to pay for their kids to take a college entrance exam test such as the ACT. Students would be more likely to take the test more seriously as it is used by Michigan's universities for admission purposes.

The change would also increase the number of students attending college, a goal consistent with the Cherry Commission on Higher Learning's task of doubling college enrollment. Illinois and Colorado enacted similar legislation a few years ago and has experienced an increase in college enrollment as a result.

While the legislation did not specifically mention the ACT as the replacement, it is widely expected that the ACT and the ACT Workskills test will be administered to high school students beginning with the 2006-07 school year.

**\*Grandparents Visitation Rights:** Grandparents would be able to petition the courts for visitation rights of their grandchildren during separation or divorce proceedings under a compromise agreement that passed the Legislature this week. The bill has been sent to the Governor for her signature.

The bill (Senate Bill 727) would still have the presumption that a fit parent's decision when denying grandparenting visitation would create a substantial risk of harm to a child's mental, physical or emotional health. To overcome this presumption, grandparents would have to prove with a preponderance of evidence that visitation would be in the best interest of the child.

Last year, the Michigan Supreme Court struck down a previous state statute that granted grandparent visitation rights by citing that the law would interfere with a parent's right to decide on what is in the best interest for their child.

**\*School Aid budget in red:** An emergency revenue estimating conference held on December 3 revealed that Michigan's budget woes continue.

The conference, which dealt only with estimates for the current fiscal year and for the fiscal year that was completed on September 30, showed that the K-12 school aid budget has a \$20 million deficit for the previous fiscal year and a \$113.2 million deficit for the current fiscal year. The general fund had a \$20 million surplus for the previous fiscal year but it currently has a \$256.8 million deficit

The legislature took steps to address the shortfall in the school aid fund by passing Senate Bill 1193 during lame duck. The bill would transfer general fund money to cover the school aid fund deficit and prevent a per pupil cut to school districts during the middle of the school year. Further steps may need to be done following the January 12, 2004 revenue estimating conference.

**\*Mobile Home Tax Reform Waxed in House:** Legislation that would have increased the monthly fee that manufactured home residents pay in taxes fell short of passage in the House earlier this week.

The increase (House Bill 4880) would have been phased-in over a period of several years and would have upped the fee to \$144 a year. A bill that would give manufactured home residents (House Bill 4868) more rights also was defeated.

Currently, manufactured home residents pay a \$3 per month fee that was established originally in 1959. The fee comes on top of the sales tax that residents pay for their home. Efforts to assess property taxes on manufacture housing were derailed in the Senate.

\* **Senate Bill 601:** The Michigan House passed a bill late Thursday evening that would allow a home rule city to adopt an ordinance by reference without publishing it in full. A copy of the complete code would still be available for public inspection at the city clerk's office. I sponsored Senate Bill 601 as a way to save local governments money by helping to limit their printing costs. At a time of significant cuts to revenue sharing to local governments, we must continue to find ways to be as cost effective as possible. The bill is now awaiting the Governor's signature.

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## **Mickey's TV Insider Show**

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Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

### **Sterling Heights**

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Utica**

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Clinton Township**

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Roseville**

Every other Tuesday at 6:05 p.m.  
(Comcast Channel 18)

\*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

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## **Coffee Hours**

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\*Please note that with the Holiday season fast approaching, I do not have any scheduled coffee hours coming up at this time. Stay turned for future editions of the Insider E-Newsletter for the next scheduled coffee hours. Have a safe and Happy Holiday.

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## Contact My Office

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**Website:** <http://www.senate.mi.gov/switalski>

**Email:** [senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov)

### Lansing Office

Senator Mickey Switalski  
Senate District 10  
410 Farnum  
PO Box 30036  
Lansing, Michigan 48909

(866)303-0110 toll free  
(517)373-7315  
Fax-(517)373-3126

### District Office

28311 Utica Road  
Roseville, MI 48066

Monday through Friday  
9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

(586)774-2430  
Fax-(586)774-0012